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The World Register of Marine Species: an authoritative, open-access web-resource for all marine species

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The World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS, www.marinespecies.org) is an online database edited by over 200 world-leading taxonomists from 27 countries. In 2007, this database grew out of the European Register of Marine Species (ERMS), and its combination with several other species registers maintained at the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) in the framework of the EU Network of Excellence MarBEF. It now integrates and hosts over 20 global (Cetacea, Porifera, ...), regional (Europe, Antarctica, Canada, ...) and thematic (harmful algae, ...) databases.

WoRMS works with related initiatives to ensure complementarity and makes its content permanently available to readers and to other databases, including the Ocean Biogeographic Information System, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, Species 2000's Catalogue of Life, and the Encyclopedia of Life. Via our website, web services and full download access, many institutions, national and international data centres and research groups are using WoRMS as their standard taxonomic reference and therefore it provides an important quality control mechanism.

As of 13th May 2011, WoRMS contains 428,824 scientific names, of which 210,339 valid species names and 136,000 important synonyms (*i.e.* incorrect names in use); 40,000 vernacular names; 147,000 key literature references; 44,000 specimen details; 325,000 published distributions; 476,000 web links; 16,000 images and many other species related information (biology, habitat, feeding type ...).

WoRMS is permanently hosted by VLIZ, which has a professional data centre with a strong focus on biological data management. The IPR of WoRMS is governed by the Society for the Management of Electronic Biodiversity Data (SMEBD).